

Great National Thoroughfare

FROM THE

WEST AND SOUTH-WEST,

INTO

NEW ENGLAND,

BY THE

Northern, or Lake Route,

FROM

NEW ORLEANS

TO

New York, Boston and Portland.



DECEMBER,

1847.

ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY.

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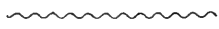
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THE

GREAT - WESTERN RAILWAY.



Aug 6 1836

In 1836, the Legislature of Illinois granted a safe, and very liberal act of incorporation, to the Illinois Central Rail-Road Company, authorizing them to open a railway from a point at, or near the mouth of the Ohio River, through the middle of the State, lengthwise, to a point at, or near the termination of the Illinois and Michigan Canal, and thence to Galena on the Mississippi River.

In 1837, the Company applied to Congress for a donation of lands, comparatively worthless at the time, and for certain preëmption rights, along the proposed route.

The petitioners were heard with favor; a report was made by the Committee on Public Lands, accompanied by a bill granting all that was asked for, and declaring the enterprize to be one of "*Great National Importance.*" But owing to opposition from a quarter wholly unexpected, the petitioners forebore to press their advantage. The State of Illinois having just entered upon a magnificent scheme of Internal Improvement, covering her whole territory, and embodying the principal object of the petitioners, they withdrew from the field.

After a prodigious and long continued effort, however, the State was obliged to abandon the scheme altogether, and in 1843, after having nearly completed the grading embankments for *forty-five miles* of the road, running from Cairo northward; and after having provided rail road iron for *three hundred and seventy miles more*, it was determined to charter a new Company, to endow it with very liberal privileges, and thereby

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enable it, if any thing could, to carry out the one great work originally contemplated.

In 1845, Committees of both branches in Congress reported Bills, granting the lands asked for by the State to aid and encourage the completion of the Great-Western Railway. A Bill passed the Senate, and but for want of time would have become a law.

It is to this, the GREAT WESTERN RAIL-WAY, or CENTRAL RAIL ROAD of ILLINOIS, running from Cairo to Galena and the Lakes, by way of Chicago; and thence connecting with all the great iron thoroughfares of New England, that the earnest attention of Northern capitalists and men of business, whatever may be their occupation, is invited. The wealth of a mighty Empire, now seeking an outlet for itself, is ready to flow into these great northern treasure-houses, whenever the gates are lifted, and the PEOPLE are in a condition to receive it. A few brief items here, may help to show what must be the inevitable consequences of such an opening, and what are the advantages and facilities which have been referred to.

And first, as to what has been already accomplished. The embankment of the Central Rail-Road begins at the depôt in Cairo, and runs for thirty miles in almost a continued line, and afterwards at different points, far enough to make about one hundred miles of embankment in the whole. The most difficult and expensive part of the road, south and north of the Illinois River, is nearly finished, extending to the level Prairies, where the expense of construction will be greatly diminished. In fact, such is the character of the land, such the cheapness of materials, and such the facilities already secured, as to render it certain that the whole expense of the road, *four hundred and fifty miles* in length, will average less than the lowest cost of any road in the world of equal goodness.

The charter provides for an estimate, (which has been made) of all the work done by the State upon the road, of the land, materials and right of way owned by her; all which may be paid for by the Company *in the bonds, or other indebt-*

edness of the State; and after the company shall have extinguished all their own corporate debts, of every description—and not till then—they are to pay into the treasury of the State one fourth part of the whole net income of the road.

“Whenever ten miles of the road are completed,” say the Committee, “it can be put in operation and rendered serviceable and useful to the State, for carrying rock and other materials to Cairo, and the same may be done for every ten miles progressively. And when forty miles are finished and in operation, the road will be highly useful and profitable in carrying coal from *one of the most extensive coal-banks in the State*, to the River.”

To the travelling community, always a source of large profit, and upon most roads, of the largest in their whole business—the advantages opened by the proposed route, both for business and pleasure, would seem to be almost incapable of exaggeration. A glance at the map will show that the nearest way to New Orleans from the Lakes, is through Cairo by the proposed railway; and that the nearest way from the Lakes to a choice of markets in Pennsylvania, New-York and New-England, and by far the pleasantest and most varied for pleasure-travelling, is from Chicago to Detroit and Buffalo, and thence into New York, New England, or the Canadas.

That such a continuous route by steam, from Portland, Maine, the ocean terminus of the Atlantic and St. Lawrence Rail-Road, to New Orleans, Louisiana, will be certainly put in operation, and at no very distant day, no business-man at all acquainted with the subject, will be disposed to deny. All the great thoroughfares of our country have a direct and continual, though not always an acknowledged, reference to the consummation of such a work as a National Highway, into which all the other highways must empty, and through which all the heaviest business of the country must ebb and flow.

On looking for Cairo, the southern terminus of the Great Western or Central Railway of Illinois, the foundations of a large city, upon which millions of dollars have been expended under the direction of able engineers; a city capable of indefi-

nite expansion, and secured against the encroachment of the Mississippi and Ohio, and from all other dangers that reasonable men would think of providing against, are found just at the junction of these two mighty rivers, and just at the head of large steamboat navigation, within three days of New-Orleans by steam, or about one thousand miles; *and open at all seasons of the year.*

The Upper-Mississippi being often closed in winter above Cairo, and the Ohio up to Pittsburgh, the navigation upon these rivers above Cairo is often stopped for weeks together by the ice; and in summer, both the Mississippi and Ohio are often so low, and for so long a time, as to put a check to the business of their waters, and baffle the calculations of shippers and travellers for the whole season.

A communication by railway between Cairo and St. Louis, and another between Cairo and Cincinnati, two of the most beautiful and thriving of our North-American cities, would soon be a matter of necessity at these two seasons of the year, mid-winter and mid-summer, and of great consequence and large profit, while both rivers were open and the waters high.

Much of the Lower-Mississippi travel, or that of the South-western States on its way north, will naturally flow through Cairo, along the proposed route to Chicago, and thence to Philadelphia, New-York, Montreal and Quebec, Boston or Portland, through the grandest, busiest, and most beautiful parts of New England, teeming with mountains, and seas, and lakes, and water-falls, and swarming with the villages, and factories, and work-shops, and farm-houses of a peculiar people, bearing little or no resemblance to any other people on the face of the earth.

So well is this understood by our neighbors of Upper Canada, that another Great Western Railway, *two hundred and twenty-seven miles in length*, has just been surveyed from Niagara to Windsor, opposite Detroit—the cost of which will be about Five millions of dollars: to connect with the Michigan Rail-Road, which runs to Chicago: and to become “*an important link in the great chain of communication between the*

Eastern and Western States." The travel upon this route is computed, by the Engineer himself, at \$556,500 a year.

It is estimated that more than *four hundred thousand* emigrants and travellers pass and repass between the South-Western and Northern States every year. Judging by what has always followed the opening of a good Railway along the great lines of travel in this country, this number would be doubled, or trebled within a few years after the completion of the road. If doubled only, the travelling would be equal to eight hundred thousand passages each way, or sixteen hundred thousand both ways, every year. Can it be doubted for a moment, that by far the larger part, if not in fact all, of these travellers, whether for business or pleasure, would betake themselves to the proposed route in preference to all others?—or that such being the advantages and prospects of the road, there will be great efforts made in building it?—or that the first four hundred miles from Cairo to Chicago, upon which the State of Illinois had expended a million of dollars before the present Company was incorporated, will be put in operation forthwith?

But in addition to the profits derived from the travelling community, it is absolutely certain that very large returns for the investment may be safely calculated on, from the passage of surplus produce from Illinois and the neighboring Territories, to the New Orleans, and Southern markets.

And these profits must go on forever increasing, in a direct ratio, with the increase of population, which, in the Western, and South-Western States has hitherto baffled, and must continue for a long period to baffle, all human calculation.

Lands hitherto unproductive, and therefore valueless, on account of the distance from markets, will be taken up at once by an active and thronging population, so as to double at least, and perhaps quadruple, the average increase of the State, along the whole line of the road.

The surplus of Illinois alone, seeking a Southern outlet at Cairo, and a Northern, at Chicago, would give at once about as much business as would be desirable, to a single track railway, and to the Illinois and Michigan Canal.

The cost of such a road being less than one half the average cost of Railways in New-England, or about one fourth the average cost of European Railways, and the income being *unlimited by the charter*, the receipts will be just what the Directors are satisfied to charge for travel and transportation, *below* the present and future rates by land or water.

The Western trade has been for thirty years, and must always continue to be, the highest prize within reach of all our cities upon the sea-board. New-Orleans, and Baltimore, and Philadelphia, and New-York, have all been built up, successively, by their participation in its advantages; and now we have Boston, with her strength and capital, and Portland, with her miraculous energies and forecast, stretching forward in the same career, and disputing the prize with a determination not to be resisted. But there is enough for all, and more than enough; and the only effect of this magnificent rivalry will be, to furnish a choice of markets for the husbandmen of Illinois, and the other Western and South-Western States.

Philadelphia, New-York, Boston and Portland, are all pushing for the Lakes, and will soon have accomplished their purpose. The next move will be to reach the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, and establish a direct inland communication for travel and business with the South-Western States, and the lower Mississippi Valley, which shall be *open at all seasons of the year*—in Winter and in Summer—in flood and drought—in peace and war. That point is clearly Cairo; and that channel of communication *as* clearly, the Central Railroad of Illinois, from Cairo to the Lakes.

Above Cairo, either on the Ohio or the Mississippi, these conditions cannot be fulfilled. Frozen up in Winter, and too low in Summer, the communication cannot be maintained, nor calculated upon with safety, by farmers, business-men, shippers or travellers, for many months in the year.

Make the time of travel between the Atlantic cities and New Orleans by way of Cairo, a matter of reasonable certainty and calculation, and, of course, it will secure a preference over all other routes, as the shortest, and cheapest, and quickest, and safest.

When the Upper-Mississippi and her tributaries are *lowest*, the prices of freight are nearly doubled. When high prices at New Orleans begin to be felt among the large producers and shippers, and the boats are crowded to St. Louis, freights begin to rise, and often reach not merely discouraging, but ruinous rates. And so in mid-winter, freights begin to rise in the fall, and continue rising to the close of navigation.

The proposed Railway having fixed rates of transportation for all seasons of the year, and Cairo being the highest accessible port on the river, *always open to New Orleans*, Producers, and Shippers, and Consumers, will severally derive advantages from it, almost incapable of being estimated, in the certainty and steadiness of markets, in supplies, prices and remittances.

But there is another important consideration, which must not be lost sight of here. The produce of the West being accumulated at Cairo, there will be no necessity for hurrying it forward at the busiest seasons, and crowding it upon the New Orleans market as heretofore; the communication by river being always open, and the prices of transportation never unreasonably enhanced by the pressure, it can always be forwarded at from three to four days notice.

That the Baltimore and Ohio Railway will be pushed to Wheeling on the Ohio, and thereby open another great avenue for business and pleasure, seems a matter of certainty; but the Railroad to the Lakes from Cairo being once in operation, who are they that would risk the navigation of the Ohio above Cairo, where uncertainty or delay were grounds of objection?

There being no stage route from Cairo to the interior, the communication between St. Louis, one of the most active and prosperous of our American cities, and the Lower and Upper Mississippi, is almost entirely cut off, when the river is closed by ice. Such a road, then, as that in contemplation, would be of incalculable advantage to St. Louis herself, and to all her dependencies and associates.

The cost of public highways through the deep, rich and loose soil of Illinois being very great, and the roads already opened, being capable of use in the Summer and Fall only,

and well nigh impassable in Winter and Spring—the whole travel and transportation of the country must of necessity pass over this Railway for a great part of the year, and would always prefer it when expedition, safety and cheapness were thought elements worthy of consideration.

But there is another view of the subject, which opens itself to the Statesman, and must not be overlooked by any that love their Country. For the transportation of the mails, of troops and munitions of war, to any and all points threatened by an enemy, by land or sea, such a road belongs naturally to a system of warlike defence for the whole Country. Nor is it unworthy of consideration, how largely and certainly it would promote the sale and settlement of public lands, as well as those belonging to Northern Capitalists, from Cairo to Galena and Chicago.

The following extracts from the letter of Senator Breeze of Illinois, to Senator Bayard, Chairman of the Committee of Naval Affairs in the U. S. Senate, and from the Memorial to Congress, already referred to, are worthy of profound consideration.

“The advantageous position of *Cairo* (the terminus of the Railroad) for a *Depot*, is demonstrated with a clearness and strength of illustration, which admits of no question whatever. *There*,” says the Hon. Senator, “all the great rivers of the West converge, as to a centre, to which the productions of the country may be sent upon their thousand branches, as on the radii of a circle to its centre, and thence despatched from that centre to the Gulf of Mexico on the South, or the Lakes on the North, or the frontiers of Mexico, and the Indian tribes on the West, and North West.

“*There*, most of the commerce of those mighty rivers, the Missouri, the Upper Mississippi, the Wabash and the Ohio, the Cumberland and the Tennessee, must pass on its way to the Ocean. It is far enough North to avoid the discomforts and fevers of a Southern climate; and far enough South to avoid the frost, which, during a portion of each winter, binds in fetters the giant streams of the great West. *It* lies at the

very head of navigation from the Sea, for vessels of large burthen, and midway, as it were, between two extremities of what is soon to become literally a highway for the nations; between New York, Boston and Portland at the North, and New Orleans at the South, over which, by the way of the great Lakes, must soon pour another steadily growing tide of emigration and interchange. *It* is the converging point of a system of Railways, thirteen hundred miles in length, upon which the State of Illinois has already expended millions of dollars, and which, in time, will be completed, together with her Canal. It has many of the advantages of a sea-port. *There*, the great rivers never freeze over—and if ever obstructed by running ice, it is only for a day.” The importance of this Railroad is thus set forth by citizens of Illinois, in their Memorial to Congress.

1. *Its importance to the interests of the individual citizen.*

From the mouth of the Ohio to the Illinois river, the road is to run nearly in the centre of the State, and through a region distant from the Mississippi and Illinois rivers on the west, and the Ohio and Wabash rivers on the east. A new outlet to market will thus be opened to an extensive agricultural region, now filling up with a hardy and industrious population. Moreover, the navigation of the rivers, above the junction of the Ohio and Mississippi, is more or less obstructed every year by low water and by ice, in consequence of which the upper country is shut out during a portion of the summer and winter from the Southern markets; whereas this road, commencing at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, where they are never frozen over, will afford to an extensive region of country uninterrupted access to perpetual steamboat navigation. The scope of its usefulness in that respect will be greatly enlarged by the extension of the road to the mineral region in the northern part of the State and in Wisconsin, and by finishing the cross road already partially constructed from the Illinois river, through Jacksonville, Springfield, Decatur, and Danville, to connect with the Wabash and Erie canal in the valley of the Wabash. In this connection it will afford,

while the navigation of the lakes is unobstructed, a choice of markets to almost the entire State of Illinois, the way being open, as well by the Illinois and Michigan canal and upper lakes, as by the Wabash and Erie canal, Lake Erie, the New York canals, the Hudson river, and the Western railway, to New York and Boston, and the numerous intermediate cities and towns.

In the same degree will this improvement facilitate the importation of foreign and domestic goods into the interior of Illinois from New Orleans on the south, and New York and Boston on the east—thus reducing the prices to the people, while it increases their means of payment.

To the travel, as well as the trade of the country, this railroad is destined to be of the utmost consequence. To its termination, at the mouth of the Ohio, the navigation from New Orleans, in the largest and most commodious steamboats, is always open. On the north, it is destined not only to reach the Territory of Wisconsin, but, connecting with the Illinois and Michigan canal on the one hand, and the Wabash and Erie canal on the other, it will form, with existing improvements, a connected route for the travel, in steamboats, railroad cars, and canal boats, between New Orleans, New York, and Boston, and the innumerable points with which they are connected by similar improvements. From desire of change, many travellers will at all times take this route from and to the mouth of the Ohio; and when the navigation of the rivers above the mouth becomes uncertain, from low water in summer, all the through-going, as well as the local travel will take this route, as will also the local travel when the rivers are obstructed by ice. Already does a large portion of the travel from the Southwestern section of the Union, to the cities and watering places of the North go by way of the Lakes; and the completion of this improvement, increasing its comfort and lessening the time occupied, will greatly increase the proportion of those, who, for comfort, health, and pleasure, will prefer a northern route. Nor is the time distant, when those who now seek relief from the discomforts and diseases of the summer in the Southwest, will divide their attention be-

tween the existing watering places of New York and Virginia, and new establishments to spring up on the waters of the great lakes and the upper Mississippi, to which this road will, at the proper season, afford the only direct, certain, and comfortable means of access. In fine, although it will not prevent trade and travel upon the rivers at all convenient seasons, it will form the only connecting link in the North for *uninterrupted* trade and travel between vast regions, embracing half the present population of our Republic. By the construction of branch roads to Alton, St. Louis, and other points on the Mississippi, its advantages will be still further extended; and, should Michigan push her railroads across the isthmus and around the south end of Lake Michigan, a connection will undoubtedly be formed with those improvements, to the mutual advantage of both parties."

2. *The importance of this improvement to the State of Illinois.*

A glance at the map, and the route of this road running through the centre of the State nearly its whole length from south to north, must convince even the unreasoning of its vast importance to the people as a local improvement. It may be compared to a new river opened through the State, superior to the Mississippi and Illinois, or the Ohio and Wabash, because always navigable, and free from the malaria, so fatal to human life, which their waters sometimes engender. It will give to a long range of high prairie country more than the advantages of river bottom lands, without their unhealthiness. It will immediately add to the value of real property within reach of the road to many times the amount of its cost, and, in the permanent market afforded for the products of the soil, open an inexhaustible mine of wealth to the citizen and the State. It was the estimate of the land office in 1836, that, of 1,361,613 acres of land within five miles of the route of this road between the mouth of the Ohio and the Illinois river, only 340,253 acres had been entered, leaving 1,521,360 still unsold; and that, of 704,000 on the route from that point to Galena, only 42,880 had been entered, leaving 661,120 unsold. These lands, in general, are among the best farming lands in the world, and

they remain vacant only because of their distance from navigable waters, and their being, in a measure, destitute of fuel and timber. The railroad will at the same time open a market to them, and bring them timber for building and fencing from the forests on the lower part of the line, and coal for fuel from the inexhaustible beds in the same region. The effect will be not only to bring these lands into market, and promote their settlement, but to triple or quadruple the value both of the located and those now unlocated, adding immensely to the wealth of the State and to her means of raising a revenue.

And the same effect will be produced upon the routes of all branch roads which may be constructed to the right and left, whether to Alton and other points on the Mississippi, or to Shawneetown, Terre Haute, Covington, or other points on the Ohio and the Wabash. In this manner the revenue of the State will be increased without an increase of taxes, aiding her to retrieve her credit and relieve herself from debt.

If the company shall be enabled to proceed with this improvement, the State of Illinois will be enabled to extinguish a portion of her debt by selling to them the property and improvements already made upon the line, under the provisions of the late charter. Now, all the work done on the line, and most of the property, is practically a dead loss, while the interest on her bonds is accumulating. It is therefore her interest, as soon as possible, to exchange these improvements and property for State bonds, as the charter proposes.

Finally, the State is ultimately to receive one-fourth of the nett income of the road. This, if the company are not mistaken in their estimates, will, soon after the road is completed, afford the State an important addition to her revenue, and one, thenceforward, perpetually increasing.

3. *The importance of this improvement to the United States.*

Every thing which benefits the people of any State, redounds to the advantage of the great community of which they form a part, increasing its population, its wealth, and its power. All that is stated under the two preceding heads is therefore applicable to this head also. Yet, there are sundry

particulars in which the construction of this road would be peculiarly advantageous to the United States.

The General Government now own, perhaps, two millions of acres of land within five miles of the route of this road, some of which has been subject to entry for thirty years, and the whole, it is presumed, on an average, over ten years. Nor is there the least probability that, without some improvement of this sort, most of it will be sold for fifty years to come. But let it be seen that this railroad is making its way through the prairies, backed by a power which will certainly bring it to a speedy completion, and scarcely a quarter section would remain unsold for two years, and the whole range, right and left, would soon be covered with thriving farms. The making of this road, therefore, would put money into the Treasury of the United States, and, at the same, cover a beautiful country with a dense population.

Its advantages for the transportation of the mails are not to be overlooked. The Western rivers generally are, and always must be in a great measure, unavailable as mail lines, in consequence of the irregularities and uncertainties of their navigation. The Mississippi river, from New Orleans to the mouth of the Ohio, is an exception, inasmuch as its navigation is never obstructed. As soon as this road is made, there will be regular lines of steamboats from that point to New Orleans; and, connecting them with regular trains of cars upon this road, the Government may obtain a most rapid, certain, and cheap conveyance of the mails, from the great South-western emporium to the lakes and all the intermediate country.

But the most important light in which this road ought to be viewed by the General Government, is in its relation to the national defence. It commences at a point which must, sooner or later, become the depot of arms and munitions of war for the valley of the Mississippi. It is far enough from the sea on the south, from Mexico on the west, and from Canada on the north, to be perfectly secure from the attacks of a foreign enemy. See how those great navigable streams, the Ohio, Cumberland, Tennessee, and Mississippi, of which the

Missouri is a branch, concentrate their waters at that point. The thousands and tens of thousands, which, in some future war, will come pouring down them for the defence of New Orleans, will receive their arms and supplies at the mouth of the Ohio; and the brave Kentuckians will not again be obliged to remain inactive behind their lines while the battle rages, because the arms which ought to be in their hands are at Pittsburg or Newport. And if arms and munitions of war are wanted on the lakes, how quickly can they be sent by this road and the Illinois and Michigan canal to Lake Michigan, and by the Wabash and Erie canal to Lake Erie. Nor will the facilities for the transportation of men be less important. How rapidly at all seasons can regular troops be transferred from New Orleans to the lakes, or from the lakes to New Orleans! How soon could any requisite militia force be concentrated in the South or North! And if, in consequence of low water or ice, the levies in Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio, or Missouri, could not reach New Orleans in time to repel an invading foe, this railroad would enable Illinois to supply the deficiency, and be first on the field of duty and glory.

Without going further into detail, this improvement is confidently presented to Congress as one of the most important, in a military point of view, of which our country is susceptible.

The immense importance of this Road to the unsold Government Lands, and for other considerations of public interest, it is confidently believed, will induce Congress the *present session* to grant the right of way and preëmption required in aid of this great work.

The Engineer's report of estimates, surveys, maps, and amount of work already done on the Road, with every information necessary to a proper understanding of the enterprize, will be published hereafter; at which time, books for subscription to the *capital*, for the completion of the Road, will be open in the Eastern and Western cities, and due notice thereof will be given by the GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY COMPANY.

